

**THE CHRISTIAN
UNDERSTANDING
OF GOD**

THEO 331 – week 10

RECAP: THREE WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING “UNDERSTANDING”

- 1. Who God is, in his nature**
- 2. Who God is, in his actions outside himself**
- 3. How we properly respond to those actions**

GOD EXISTS

- **Christianity believes that God exists. It is not possible to be a Christian and to be an atheist/agnostic at the same time (except, perhaps, to be a Christian in name only).**
- **The Bible proclaims that God's existence is knowable to natural reason alone:**
 - **For what can be known about God is plain to [the pagans], because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. (Romans 1: 19-20)**

THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD

- **While the human imagination has ascribed a divine status to a whole host of supposed divine beings (e.g. Baal, Zeus, Venus, Thor, Ganesh, Kuan Yin, etc.), only one is real: YHWH, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.**
 - Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. (Isaiah 44: 6)
- **To be a Christian is to want to worship the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.**

SOME ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

- **God is necessary (cannot not be) and therefore is eternal.**
 - There is some debate regarding how God therefore relates to temporal creation: is God outside of time? If so, how does he relate to creatures within time?
- **God is infinitely perfect and contains every perfection. Nothing is lacking in God.**
 - God is therefore infinitely intelligent (omniscient) and infinitely powerful (omnipotent).
 - Important caveat: As God is perfectly reasonable, God cannot do the logically impossible (e.g. make a square circle).

GOD IS PERSONAL AND RELATIONAL

- **The fact that God possesses intelligence and will imply that God is a personal being.**
- **God's relational nature is revealed in his covenants. Some examples:**
 - Noah (Genesis 9:8)
 - Abraham (Genesis 17: 7-11)
 - Moses (Exodus 19: 1-6)
- **God's relational nature is active not only in his relationship with his creation, but also in his eternal relationship with himself.**

GOD IS LOVE (1 John 4: 8b)

- **This teaching is at the heart of the Christian understanding of God. It implies a revelation of God's nature and not merely his will (i.e. God is not merely loving, but his very substance is love).**
- **All God's actions, and all revelations concerning God, need to be interpreted in the light of this statement.**

GOD IS TRIUNE (1)

- **There is a threefold dimension to God's nature.**
 - A famous attempt to explain this is the psychological metaphor of Saint Augustine of Hippo (the three dimensions are intelligence, will, and memory).
- **A more modern analogy is recognizes that God must possess existence, essence, and logos.**
 - Existence is the property of having being.
 - Essence is the property of being a particular kind of being.
 - Logos is the capacity to influence (i.e. be relevant to) other beings.

GOD IS TRIUNE (2)

- **Created things possess these three realities, but only God has them in perfect unity (e.g. his essence IS his existence).**
- **While each person of the Trinity is distinct from the other (i.e. is its own *hypostasis*), the persons of the Trinity are also all *homoousios*, i.e. consubstantial. They are all equal participants in the divine nature. The persons are not distinguished from each other, therefore, by their substance, but by their internal relations.**

EACH ASPECT OF THE TRIUNE REALITY IS PERSONAL

- **As God is personal and relational, and as each aspect of the triune reality shares completely in the properties of the other, each aspect is personal and relational as well, and can properly be called a “person”.**
 - i.e. modalism is out!
- **It is God’s nature as Love that prevents this “communion of persons” from losing its inherent unity and “splitting” into mere individuals.**
 - i.e. the doctrine of the Trinity should never be interpreted or presented in a way that contradicts monotheism
- **Another analogy for the triune nature: God is lover, beloved, and the love between them, from all eternity.**

TITLES FOR THE TRINITY

- Of the persons of the Trinity, only the Father is called “God” (*ho theos*) in the proper sense. The full title of the Son is actually “Son of God”, and the full title of the Holy Spirit is actually “Spirit of God”.
 - The shortened formula for these three are “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”. These are the most important titles of persons of the Trinity.
 - Parallel numerical titles also exist: first person of the Trinity, second person of the Trinity, third person of the Trinity.
- The second person of the Trinity is sometimes identified by the titles “Word of God” or “Wisdom of God”.

THE TRINITARIAN RELATIONS

- **The Father is the mono-archè (sole source) of the Trinity. He is the “unbegotten” person.**
- **The Son proceeds from the Father in an eternal procession, and therefore is called “eternally begotten”.**
- **The Spirit proceeds from the Father as well. At present there is still controversy over the role of the Son in this procession of the Spirit within the Trinity, as well as regarding how these two processions can be distinguished from each other.**
- **The fact of “proceeding” from another does not mean that the “one who proceeds” is somehow inferior or subordinated, because these processions are eternally part of God’s nature and therefore cannot be “turned off”. The Father is as much bound by the process of procession as is the Son and the Spirit.**